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February 18, 2017

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Jim McCauley
Executive Director
Interdistrict Committee for Project Oceanology
jmccauley@oceanology.org

Re: S. B. No. 510
Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program
Education Issues

Dear Appropriations Committee Members,

I am writing to urge you to maintain funding levels for the Interdistrict Committee for Project Oceanology at Avery Point by supporting S. B. 510 and the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant (IDCG) program. Please continue to provide Connecticut students the opportunity to experience Project Oceanology's inquiry-based marine science programs through our hands-on educational enrichment activities which are tremendously effective at meeting the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) goals of increasing student achievement and reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation.

Project Oceanology's mission since 1972 has been to nurture enthusiasm for science and our planet's marine environment. Established as an Interdistrict Committee of schools, colleges and other educational institutions under Section 10-158a of the Connecticut General Statutes, Project Oceanology (Project O) has pioneered a hands-on, inquiry oriented approach to science through programs meeting state education standards. Our leased waterfront facilities on the University of Connecticut's Avery Point Campus in Groton are used to provide year round, marine science and environmental education. Our research vessels, skiffs, oceanographic equipment, and marine laboratories have been used to educate nearly one million students and adults over more than four decades as they have learned about the ocean, estuaries, rivers and marine life through firsthand, on-the-water, science-rich experiences in the surrounding waters of Long Island Sound, Fishers Island Sound and the Thames River.

Since the inception of the IDCG program in 1994, Project O's IDCG programs have served more than 15,000 students in Connecticut through a myriad of highly effective school-day, afterschool, weekend, and summer educational programs. In accordance with CSDE's limit for fiscal year 2018 IDCG applications, Project O has submitted a single proposal for a *Connecticut River Connections* program that will serve 900 students in grades 6 through 8 from 16 school districts in the Connecticut River watershed. An estimated 44% of the students will be Asian, Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino; half the students will be from districts with more than 47% of their students enrolled in Connecticut's free or reduced lunch program.

The Connecticut River is a valuable and shared natural resource that provides an exceptional educational framework to introduce teams of students from paired urban and suburban or rural schools to the world of marine science. *Connecticut River Connections* brings students of diverse backgrounds together to learn and apply scientific inquiry practices related to the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound environments. Students engage in the study of marine and aquatic ecosystems of the Connecticut River through a series of hands-on, brains-on experiences involving classroom, marine laboratory, and field activities along the shoreline and aboard Project O's research vessels. The teamwork and collaboration resulting from small group assignments results in students recognizing the genuine value of diverse backgrounds and perspectives inherent in each other's race, ethnicity and/or social class. *Connecticut River Connections* has been supported by teachers and sought after by students from participating districts since 2003. The integration of real-world marine issues and open-ended exploration has inspired students' interest in science while effectively implementing Next Generation Science Standards and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) concepts. Parents of students that participate in *Connecticut River Connections* have an opportunity to observe the students' accomplishments at an open house event where student teams demonstrate scientific principles and skills learned during the program.

Project O is committed to creating, capturing and delivering educational value and is currently engaged in a strategic planning process to identify further improvements to our marine science education programs. With support being received by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, this strategic planning will help define the evolution of Project Oceanology's services to meet Connecticut's 21st Century learners' needs.

I realize that action must be taken to try to balance the State of Connecticut's budget. However, education of Connecticut's youth has been and should continue to be considered one of the core and essential services for our residents. The IDCG program is an important component of those services but has been reduced 31% in the last two years alone, and Project O's funding through the IDCG has been reduced nearly 50% in the last eight years.

Please support S. B. 510 to maintain funding levels for the Interdistrict Committee for Project Oceanology through the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant program. Your support will allow Project O to continue to achieve the Connecticut Department of Education goals of increasing student achievement and reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation.

If you have any questions, please contact me at jmccauley@oceanology.org or the Chairman of the Delegate Assembly for Project Oceanology, Mr. Michael O'Connor, at MOConnor@waterfordschools.org.

Sincerely,

Jim McCauley
Executive Director